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ABSTRACT

Four documents and seven journal articles on the management of enrollment decline, selected from those recently made available through the ERIC system, are described briefly in this report. Topics covered in the items listed include what can be done at the state level, suggestions for projecting enrollment, how instructional space is being utilized, how long range planning can be accomplished, how to deal with stress in the administration of a shrinking district, how Minnesota has responded to enrollment decline, the uses of busing and leaves of absence to counteract enrollment decline, suggestions for maintaining educational quality, how citizens can be involved, and how computer simulation can make school closing easier. (PGD)

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THE BEST OF ERIC

ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Number 58 March 1981

The Best of ERIC presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

The selections are intended to give educators easy access to the most significant and useful information available from ERIC. Because of space limitations, the items listed should be viewed as representative, rather than exhaustive, of literature meeting those criteria.

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

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Managing Declining Enrollment

1 **Abramowitz, Susan.** "The Dilemma of Decline." Paper presented at the National Association of State Boards of Education annual meeting, Williamsburg, Virginia, October 1979. 13 pages. ED 184 233.

In the early 1970s, declining enrollments caught many educators off guard. Currently, most districts are still experiencing decline, but in other districts within the same state or region, enrollments might be increasing. In short, "growth and decline are occurring simultaneously" and many districts don't know what to expect next. These conditions, states Abramowitz, point out the need for improved educational management, particularly planning. In this document, Abramowitz outlines some of the actions that state governments could take to aid local districts in managing decline.

Most district managers are unable to make accurate predictions of future enrollments because of difficulties in obtaining and utilizing data about population and economic trends. These difficulties would be alleviated, says Abramowitz, if states developed reliable systems for the collection and dissemination of information on economic conditions, migration patterns, and other social and economic indicators.

States could provide other forms of technical assistance to districts as well, particularly assistance designed to improve management practices. The National Association of State Boards of Education, the National School Boards Association, and other professional associations could also help, says Abramowitz, by publishing information, holding seminars, and offering training programs and workshops on the management of decline.

Declining enrollments also threaten recent gains in affirmative action and special services. The state could intercede to protect affirmative action, Abramowitz contends, and could help alleviate the impact of cuts in special service funding by promoting the establishment of regional units or consortiums of districts among which the costs of these services could be shared.

2 **Bishop, Lloyd.** "Dealing with Declining School Enrollments." *Education and Urban Society*, 11, 3 (May 1979), pp. 185-95. EJ 205 697.

Before a school district can deal effectively with the complex political and organizational aspects of declining enrollment, it must have accurate data on future student enrollments and on the condition of all school facilities. Bishop here provides suggestions for solving these "technical problems of accurate data gathering" and discusses other general "strategies for dealing with decline."

Declining birthrate is of course the primary cause of enrollment declines nationwide. But locally, other demographic factors may be at work and should be considered carefully to obtain a more accurate enrollment forecast. Bishop lists many of these factors, including residential housing patterns, local building costs, in- and out-migration, multiunit housing development, and past population trends.

After accurate data have been collected, the district should establish and publicize the criteria it will use to decide which schools to close. To reduce public outcry, "these criteria should be announced well in advance to the community so the ground rules are understood prior to any public report on the consolidation of schools." Criteria to consider include facility condition, the effect of closures on racial balance, physical and natural barriers in the community, and changed student transportation needs.

To ease the stress of closing schools, districts should solicit community and school personnel input through opinion surveys and advisory committees. "If these committees are open to wide community participation, they can provide an excellent means of providing various interest groups a platform for discussion," states Bishop, and thus can "defuse potential conflicts" over school closures.

3 **Dembowski, Frederick L.** "The Effects of Declining Enrollments on the Instructional Programs of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, Boston, April 1980. 24 pages. ED 184 208.

In recent years, numerous articles have been written giving advice on how to deal with the problem of declining enrollment. Most of these recommendations, however, have concentrated on the fiscal impact of declining enrollment, whereas the impact on instructional programs has been largely overlooked. To help fill this void, Dembowski conducted a nationwide survey of school districts to determine both the effects of declining enrollment on instructional programs and school administrators' responses to the problem.

Dembrowski sent questionnaires to 320 school districts of varying size, geographical location, and "percent student population change (ADM) from 1970-1977" and received 95 responses. The survey showed that between 1970 and 1977 districts with declining enrollments had, in general, more dropouts, a higher median staff age, an earlier teacher retirement policy, increased teacher certifi-

cation requirements, and more staff relocation than did districts with increasing enrollments. Districts with declining enrollments also tended to use alternative educational approaches more and to replace their instructional materials less often. Districts with increasing enrollments indicated less change in the quality of educational programs—either up or down—than did districts losing students.

Districts with high rates of decline were not reducing the number of courses they offered as fast as they were reducing the number of staff teaching those courses. "Apparently school districts are not reducing their comprehensive educational programs" if they can retain "teachers versatile enough to teach all these courses," Dembowski observes.

As districts decline in enrollment, the amount of space allotted to each instructional area does not increase, but instead stays about the same. Dembowski speculates that districts must be getting rid of excess space instead of expanding into it.

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4 **Eisenberger, Katherine E.** "How to Learn to Manage Decline in Your School System." *American School Board Journal,* 165, 7 (July 1978), pp. 36-38. EJ 183 255.

Long-range planning is essential for dealing effectively with declining enrollment. Yet a school board's decision on the district's long-range plan will be neither forceful nor consistent if voting is the primary method of decision-making. Developing a workable, long-range plan for dealing with declining enrollment, Eisenberger contends, requires a consensus-based system of decision-making. To make consensus work for something so extensive and complex as a long-range plan, Eisenberger suggests a "divide and conquer" approach to the decision-making process.

First a list of the proposed segments of the plan should be made. Sections on which everyone can agree should be put aside. Segments over which there is disagreement should be listed and a record made of the pros and cons for each. Next, areas of partial agreement in the pros and cons should be searched for. "This narrowing down," says Eisenberger, "creates a sense of progress and can generate a positive frame of mind."

The areas of greatest disagreement should be specifically identified, and discussion should focus on these areas until an agreement satisfactory to all board members is reached. "Objections occur for specific reasons," Eisenberger points out. "Identifying these concerns and finding ways to resolve them are essential to arriving ultimately at over-all consensus."

Once the entire plan is assembled, each board member should explain why he or she approves of the plan. "This final phase in the process is vital," states Eisenberger, "because it clarifies each board member's point of view, signals solidarity," and prepares the board for the important work of selling the plan to school personnel and the community.

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5 **Iannaccone, Laurence.** "The Management of Decline: Implications for Our Knowledge in the Politics of Education." *Education and Urban Society,* 11, 3 (May 1979), pp. 418-30. EJ 205 703.

Normally, school districts and other political systems continue to operate even though fundamental, unresolved tensions remain in their political structures. "Declining enrollment problems tend to heighten or make manifest" these latent tensions, says Iannaccone. "The political nerve hit by declining enrollment problems everywhere—one of its universal political aspects—is the somewhat hidden political tensions already present in the local political system."

The management of declining enrollment would be easier if school administrators understood the politics of education, in particular the ways districts react to a stress such as declining enrollment and then eventually stabilize again. The patterns of reaction to such stresses have been studied in school districts, states Iannaccone, and many of these studies have predictive power. It is clear, though, "that educational administrators are either unaware of this body of research or do not make the inference needed to put the existing knowledge . . . to work as they address the problems of declining enrollments."

Part of this "existing knowledge" concerns the interaction of technical information and political values in the policy-making process. At each stage of the policy-making process, technical information (such as enrollment projections and facilities reviews) is used primarily "to crystallize political inputs to a policy choice." School administrators should remember that their role in dealing with declining enrollments is one of "political conflict management" and should avoid becoming "wedded to the implied technical solutions" to the problem.

In this interesting article, Iannaccone also critiques and reflects on several of the preceding articles in the same issue of *Education and Urban Society,* which describe how districts ranging in size from rural to large-urban have responded to declining enrollments.

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6 **Mazzoni, Tim L., and Mueller, Van D.** "School District Planning for Enrollment Decline: The Minnesota Approach." *Phi Delta Kappan,* 61, 6 (February 1980), pp. 406-10. EJ 215 961.

School district planning in Minnesota has traditionally been decentralized. When Minnesota schools began experiencing declining enrollment in the early 1970s, however, this decentralized planning system failed to provide adequate guidance for a smooth transition to smaller school systems.

In the mid-1970s, the state legislature finally stepped in and passed three laws specifying planning and organizational procedures for the state's school districts. In this informative article, Mazzoni and Mueller detail these laws, describe the recent history

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of state responses to declining enrollment, and discuss the implications and future of state planning in Minnesota.

In 1971, when school enrollments were at an all-time high, the legislature passed its first bill to "cushion" a district's revenue loss resulting from declining enrollment. Between 1973 and 1977, several other statutes were amended or created to ease the impact of declining enrollment.

In early 1976, the legislature established the state's first school-planning law, which authorized the establishment of Educational Cooperative Service Units (ECSUs). ECSUs are designed both to encourage regional educational planning and to provide educational services on a regional rather than a local basis if students are better served that way. In late 1976 and 1977, the legislature passed other bills requiring districts to use curriculum evaluations and planning as well as comprehensive planning on both regional and district levels.

The authors draw three conclusions about Minnesota's response to declining enrollment. First, "it did not require a crisis for state government to respond to changed conditions" in Minnesota, though the state's response "was reactive, not anticipatory." Second, state officials provided leadership through the initiation of legislative responses, often in the face of substantial resistance from special-interest groups. Third, "political bargaining, not rational design, was the central dynamic of the policy-making process," a result to be expected from any legislative process.

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7 **Nowakowski, James A.** "Hidden Opportunities in Declining Enrollments." *American School and University*, 52, 8 (April 1980), pp. 40, 42s, 44. EJ 221 566.

A few of the complex problems facing school districts today "manage to be transformed by the passage of time into blessings rather than curses." Declining enrollment, says Nowakowski, is one of these rare problems. As a case in point, Nowakowski describes the innovative coping strategies developed in a suburban Chicago school district.

Leyden Township District 212 was experiencing declining enrollment and considered going to the "2-2 Plan" with its two high schools, separating the lower and upper classes into the two buildings. Instead, the district decided to stagger the schedules of the two high schools and bus some students back and forth to fill up classes in each building. "A student could be bused for courses from one school to another, losing only one period through the staggering instead of the two periods if both schools were on the same schedule," explains Nowakowski.

Several other advantages accompanied this arrangement. Each building maintained its identity, and more students had an opportunity to participate in varsity sports. Also, the district could make bus driving a full-time position instead of a part-time position, which made it easier to find drivers.

Leyden school district has alleviated its staffing problems with an innovative policy regarding leaves of absences. According to Superintendent David Byrnes, "the board encourages any teachers with tenure to take a leave of absence if they've been thinking about it for some time. We do this by offering to retain the tenure of that teacher."

The teacher can take an absence of one or more years and can return at the beginning of any school year without question as long as "the reduction of force hasn't reached his or her seniority level." So far, the policy is working, "despite the seeming risk involved in a board offering to retain the tenure of absent teachers."

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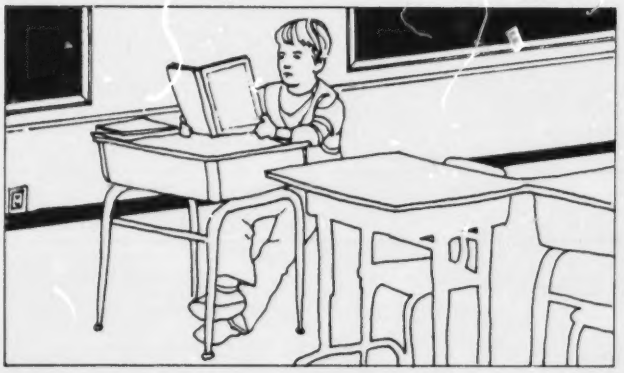
8 **Relic, Peter D.** "Don't Let Quality Fall with Enrollments." *American School Board Journal*, 167, 8 (August 1980), pp. 29-30. EJ 230 084.

According to a recent survey, school board members consider declining enrollment to be the number one problem in public education today. "But what really concerns board members," Relic contends, "is the effect declining enrollment will have on the *quality* of local schools." In response to this concern, Relic here offers several suggestions for helping school boards maintain quality secondary schools in times of declining enrollment.



An initial step is to define what is meant by "quality." "Are quality schools ones that produce students with a firm command of a few skills," Relic asks, "or ones that produce students with a broad background in numerous disciplines?" The board must decide and then use appropriate standardized tests to determine where the district's students stand. Board members should also pay close attention to other indicators of quality, such as the percentage of students graduating from high school each year, attendance statistics, and overall grade point averages.

Because fewer new teachers enter the school system in times of declining enrollment, teacher inservice training becomes particularly important for improving educational quality. Relic advises boards to make sure that funding is adequate for inservice training and curriculum development programs, to leave sufficient time in staff schedules for faculty study, and to tap all possible sources for ideas and development strategies for inservice programs.

Board members should also step up discussion with school officials, community members, and social science experts about why secondary schools are experiencing so much difficulty. Increased dialogue, states Relic, "will help educators discover answers to their questions about what has gone wrong with initiative, productivity, and creativity in the U.S." Once boards understand the problems, they can "move ahead with a redirection of purpose for schools."

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9 **Wachtel, Betsy, and Powers, Brian.** *Rising above Decline.* Boston: Institute for Responsive Education, 1979. 200 pages. ED 180 082.

How can citizen involvement in decisions regarding declining enrollment be enhanced? This is the question both posed and answered in this publication by the Institute for Responsive Education, which was founded, states the preface, "to increase citizen participation in educational decision-making."

Powers opens the discussion with a description of the sequence of events in a typical community following the recognition that school enrollments are declining. The board usually appoints an advisory committee of prominent and responsible citizens to help the central administration plan for declining enrollment. Although the committees are supposedly autonomous, says Powers, "professional administrators usually end up playing a firm and controlling role in the preparation of advisory committee recommendations." As a result, when the advisory committee and school board present their recommendations regarding declining enrollment to the community, there is an uproar of protest over school closures and the lack of public participation in the decision-making process.

Powers argues that this kind of public resistance to policies "developed by professionals or professionally dominated com-

mittees in isolation from the community they serve" signals "a profound change in the political climate of education." Citizens are now demanding that they be involved in critical educational decisions, such as those surrounding declining enrollment.

The next six chapters of this book describe in detail the efforts of citizens and school officials in several communities to find solutions to the problems posed by declining enrollment. Reviewed by contributing authors are descriptions of responses to declining enrollment in Salt Lake City, Skokie (Illinois), the San Francisco Bay Area, Lexington (Massachusetts), Boston, and two rural districts in Iowa.

Wachtel concludes with an essay on ways to enhance community involvement in decisions about declining enrollment. Included are descriptions of methods and tools needed to plan for declining enrollment, suggestions for conducting community surveys, and numerous suggestions for further increasing citizen influence on the district's decision-making process.

10

Wendel, Frederick C., editor. *Maintaining Quality Education in the Face of Declining Resources. Briefings in Educational Issues Number 2.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1979. 141 pages. ED 176 366.

"Quality in the public schools, now and for the future, will depend in large measure on the quality of the planning which the society and educators provide." Planning is a key theme running through the nine chapters of this publication on managing enrollment decline, written by eight professors of education at the University of Nebraska (Lincoln).

The initial chapter describes the "critical realities" present in society that impinge on school governance. The conflict between declining enrollments and Americans' "bigger is better" ethic is discussed in the second chapter.

The third chapter explores in some detail systematic planning models. The five basic questions that structure the planning process are, Why? Where are we now? Where do we want to go? How are we going to get there? and, How will we know when we get there? The planning model developed by the New Jersey Department of Education is discussed in detail, and eight other planning models are listed along with availability information.

The next chapter outlines approaches to the reduction of services and programs. The four basic approaches described are "Amputate Selected Programs," "Trim Each Program," "Allocate Resources Based on Unique Needs of a Program," and "Combining Programs."

The remaining chapters discuss issues related to student activity programs, budget reviews, reduction in force, special education programs, and the long-range implications of declining enrollment. Included is an extensive fifty-page annotated bibliography.

11

Yeager, Robert F. "Rationality and Retrenchment. The Use of a Computer Simulation to Aid Decision Making in School Closings." *Education and Urban Society,* 11, 3 (May 1979), pp. 296-312. EJ 205 698.

In the early 1970s, the Unit Four School District in Champaign (Illinois) was experiencing declining enrollment and had decided that some schools would have to be closed. Yeager—a resident of Champaign and a doctoral student doing a thesis on the use of computers in social studies education—here describes the development of "a computer simulation of school closings" that was "developed to help the school board members evaluate the consequences of closing different schools."

To help decide which schools to close, the board established several criteria, including students' walking distances, number of students bused, maintaining integration, and condition of the facilities. Two things soon became obvious, says Yeager: many of the criteria were quantifiable, and the interactions among the criteria were confusing when more than one school was considered. Thus, with the support of the administration and many community members, a computer simulation model was developed and data collected for input.

"The Unit Four simulation was unique because it was designed to show the effects of closing more than one school at a time," states Yeager. "It allowed users to specify any combination of school closings and see what impact that combination had upon the school board's criteria."

The simulation used the PLATO IV computer system for two reasons: the system had powerful graphics capabilities; and, through a National Science Foundation grant, the system was already being used in the district to teach elementary reading and math. About forty PLATO terminals were already available in the district's eight schools, so the simulation was made available to any community member who wished to use it.

Interestingly, the school board's decision on which schools to close "did not appear to be affected by the data generated by the computer simulation." The simulation did have real value, though, concludes Yeager, because it provoked many discussions in which assumptions about the delivery of education were identified and debated.

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